



PENINSULA FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB INC.

Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, Australia

NEWSLETTER: MARCH 2012

December Excursion: Cranbourne Botanic Gardens

A small group visited the CBG for our final excursion for the year. The weather was pleasant and the picnic grounds were popular.

The first thing we noticed was that the Bell Miners had left the picnic grounds – on past visits the picnic ground seemed to be full of them. We have often seen bandicoots there as well, but perhaps because there were a number of picnic groups there the bandicoots were not to be seen.

As always we took a couple of walks, firstly over the lookout hill to the Australia Garden, and after lunch around the wetlands.

We found that the Bell Miners had moved to the car park at the Australia Garden; the Garden has advanced quite a bit since our last visit, and further expansion is well underway.

Our bird count for the day was 36, including Brush Bronzewing. Birds that were heard but remained elusive were the Pallid and Shining Bronze Cuckoos, and both Golden and Rufous Whistlers.

Other sightings included Jacky Lizard and Blotched Bluetongue, echidna, and Swamp Wallaby.

Also sighted on the way out was a White-necked Heron in a paddock just outside the gates. These herons, and Great Egrets, have been noticeably more common on the Peninsula and other parts of southern Victoria this summer. - **Lee Denis**

Bird List Cranbourne Botanic Gardens 17/12/2011

Pacific Black Duck	Red Wattlebird
Chestnut Teal	Bell Miner
Hoary-headed Grebe	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Australian White Ibis	White-eared Honeyeater
Straw-necked Ibis	New Holland Honeyeater
Wedge-tailed Eagle	Eastern Yellow Robin
Purple Swamphen	Golden Whistler (heard)
Dusky Moorhen	Rufous Whistler (heard)
Eurasian Coot	Grey Shrike-thrush
White faced heron	Magpie-Lark
Masked Lapwing	Grey Fantail
Common Bronzewing	Willie Wagtail
Brush Bronzewing	Black-faced Cuckoo-Shrike
Rainbow Lorikeet	Dusky Woodswallow
Pallid Cuckoo (heard)	Australian Magpie
Shining Bronze-Cuckoo (heard)	Australian Raven
Superb Fairy-wren	Welcome Swallow
Spotted Pardalote	Common Myna



Jacky Lizard (Photo: Lee Denis)

December: Birdwatching at Bangholme and Langwarrin FFR

Our planned birdwatching destination was the small area of wetland in Rossiter Rd, opposite the

Eastern Treatment Plant in Bangholme. First impressions were that there were very few birds to be seen, and that although the day was sunny and fine the wind was exceptionally cold.

Consequently we cut short our time there and moved to the Langwarrin Flora and Fauna Reserve. However, on making our bird list we discovered that there were more birds on the wetland than we had realised, finishing with a total of 22 including a couple of bush birds – Red-rumped Parrot and Yellow-rumped Thornbill.

Bird List for Rossiter Rd, Bangholme, 5/12/2011	
Black Swan	Black-winged Stilt
Australian Wood Duck	Masked Lapwing
Pacific Black Duck	Silver Gull
Little Pied Cormorant	Magpie-Lark
White-faced Heron	Willie Wagtail
Great Egret	Red rumped parrot
Australian White Ibis	Yellow rumped thornbill
Straw-necked Ibis	Australian Magpie
Yellow-billed Spoonbill	European Goldfinch
Purple Swamphen	Common Starling
Dusky Moorhen	Common Myna

At Langwarrin FFR it was a relief to get out of the wind. The forest was alive with Common Brown Butterflies, and we added a few birds to the days list. Of the 23 birds sighted at Langwarrin only three had been seen at Rossiter Rd. We were pleased to see Brown-headed Honeyeater, Yellow Thornbill and Mistletoebird, as well as get a close-up view of a Rufous Whistler singing his heart out.

As always, the orchids were good - the highlight being Flying Duck Orchids (*Caleana major*), also Common bird orchid (*Chiloglottis valida*), Hyacinth orchids (*Dipodium roseum*), and Onion orchids (*Microtis* sp.) We didn't get up to the Warrandyte Rd end to see the Horned

Orchids.

We did find a mystery plant (pea family with yellow flowers) which we were unable to identify; this plant was identified for us by Leon Costermans:

“It is a weed, *Callistachys lanceolata* (used to be *Oxylobium lanceolata*), commonly called Green-bush. It's easy to identify because the fairly long narrow leaves are mostly in 3s.

It's from WA, and was planted in the Langwarrin area and has become a real pest. Of course, people think it's pretty because the flowers are large and showy for a pea-plant being strong yellow. It can become a small tree.

We have got rid of most of them over the years, but like all Fabaceae, the seeds germinate after a fire, and so they tend to appear after Parks Victoria's burns. There are usually dozens of little ones around the parent plant.”

Thanks to Leon for his help. - Lee Denis

Bird List for Langwarrin FFR, 5/12/2011	
Straw-necked Ibis	Eastern Yellow Robin
Rainbow Lorikeet	Rufous Whistler
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	Grey Shrike-thrush
Laughing Kookaburra	Grey Fantail
Superb Fairy-wren	Dusky Woodswallow & young
Brown Thornbill	Grey Butcherbird
Yellow thornbill	Australian Magpie
Red Wattlebird	Little Raven
White-eared Honeyeater	European Goldfinch
Brown-headed Honeyeater	Mistletoebird
White-naped Honeyeater	Welcome Swallow
Eastern Spinebill	

February Meeting: Southern Africa – talk by Heather Ducat, member.

Heather and husband Robert travelled in Africa May to September 2009. She spoke last year on the Madagascar part of her journey. This part started and finished in Cape Town, a beautiful

and spectacular city, with a coastal national park on a peninsula next to the city, and the Kirstenbosch Botanic Gardens featuring proteaceae and fynbos (the local word for heathland plants, meaning fine leaved). A large part of South Africa is karoo desert and savannah grassland, which was once an inland

sea. They spent 4 days at Kruger National Park, which is 400k from north to south, and 70k wide, and has the most animal species of any park in South Africa, and 500 birds recorded. From there they went to Pilanesburg National Park, then Impolozo, then along the coast south to Capetown.

Travelling in South Africa is very different to Australia – because the wild animals are dangerous, lunch stops and breaks have to be carefully planned for safe places, and animals have to be viewed from within a car. Socially it is dangerous too – it was necessary to always drive with the doors locked, and Heather remarked on the “razor wire resorts” in beautiful places, but

fortified.

They visited Lesotho, an independent country, but after harassment left quickly.

Heather had a large number of spectacular bird photos – the bird life of Africa is much greater than Australia – as well as close encounters with elephant, rhinoceros, giraffe, and many others. A particular favourite was of mountain zebras on the beach near Capetown.

As always, a very interesting and well researched talk with beautiful photos. - *Judy Smart*

6 th February: Birdwatching at The Briars

As always the bird life at the Briars was well worth the effort; we were especially pleased to see so much water in the main lagoon, with birds including Great Egret and Royal Spoonbill close to the hide; an Australian Spotted Crake wandered out from the reeds next to the hide. Far across the water we could see a bird we could not quite make out – Head Ranger Steve Yorke helped us out, telling us it was a Latham's Snipe, of which he had seen several around the wetlands.

When I said the Great Egret was close to the hide, I mean **on** the hide – I had to back away to get the photo below. - **Lee Denis**



Photo – Lee Denis
Eastern Treatment Plant Bird Count

Bird List, The Briars, 6/2/2012

Black Swan	Laughing Kookaburra
Australian Wood Duck	Superb Fairy-wren
Grey Teal	Spotted Pardalote
Chestnut Teal	White-browed Scrubwren
Hardhead	Brown Thornbill
Australasian Grebe	Red Wattlebird
Hoary-headed Grebe	Noisy Miner
Little Pied Cormorant	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Little Black Cormorant	White-eared Honeyeater
Eastern Great Egret	New Holland Honeyeater
Royal Spoonbill	Eastern Spinebill
Purple Swamphen	Eastern Yellow Robin
Australian Spotted crake	Rufous Whistler
Dusky Moorhen	Grey Shrike-thrush
Eurasian Coot	Magpie-Lark
Latham's snipe	Grey Fantail
Spotted Turtle-Dove	Willie wagtail
Common Bronzewing	Grey Butcherbird
Galah	Australian Magpie
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Welcome Swallow
	Common Blackbird

In February we were fortunate to join the monthly

bird count conducted by Mike Carter and his team at the Eastern Treatment Plant in Bangholme. Entry to the ETP is strictly controlled, since it is regarded as a hazardous environment, so we were very fortunate that Mike was willing to allow us to accompany him. Six members of our club attended, with the opportunity to see birds we are unlikely to see elsewhere on the Peninsula, and certainly not in the same numbers.

The first sighting was a close view of five Nankeen Night Herons taking off as soon as we got to the treatment ponds. Other notable sightings included Pink-eared Duck, Red-necked Avocet, Great Crested Grebe, and migratory waders including Common and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers and Red-necked Stint.

The weather was somewhat unpleasant, being very hot and windy – in fact at times the scopes were shaking so much as to be virtually useless.

Whilst our club members were primarily interested in bird sightings (although we did some tentative counting), Mike and his team set to the work of counting, including putting on the

gumboots and getting closer to view the waders far out in the pond.



Photo: Lee Denis

Thanks to Mike Carter and South-east Water for the opportunity to participate in the survey and even to contribute to the work of counting. It provided us with an almost unique opportunity so close to home Mike's full report for the day is included below, including some magnificent photographs taken by Allison Kuiter – again thanks to Mike and Allison for allowing us to reprint them here. **Lee Denis**

E.T.P. (38°04'S 145°10'E) Bird Count on 26.02.2012 (08.50-18.15).

By Mike Carter, Dawn Neylan, David Stabb, Alison Kuiter & Lee Denis.

Weather: Pleasant in a.m. but in p.m. temperature rising to >34°C and humidity high. Mostly sunny with increasing cloud in p.m. Strong N wind all day.

Coverage: 100%. Many 'lagoons' are now dry so less area & fewer birds to count.

Bird names and order in accordance with the Australian Checklist, C & B (2008).

Musk Duck	3		Little Pied Cormorant	60	(-)
Freckled Duck	-		Great Cormorant	4	
Cape Barren Goose	2		Little Black Cormorant	10	(-)
Black Swan (1 broods)	165		Australian Pelican	45	
Australian Shelduck	9		White-necked Heron	-	
Australian Wood Duck	120	(4)	Eastern Great Egret	2	(-)
Pink-eared Duck	270		Intermediate Egret	-	
Australasian Shoveler	18		White-faced Heron	13	(2)
Grey Teal	900	(4)	Little Egret	-	
Chestnut Teal	600	(6)	Nankeen Night Heron (6 ads.)	7	(-)
Pacific Black Duck	110	(2)	Glossy Ibis	-	
Hardhead	6		Australian White Ibis	24	(-)
Blue-billed Duck	1		Straw-necked Ibis	3	
Australasian Grebe	40	(1)	Royal Spoonbill	7	(2)
Hoary-headed Grebe	120	(-)	Yellow-billed Spoonbill	11	(7)
Great Crested Grebe	3		Black-shouldered Kite	4	(1)
Spotted Dove	38	(14)	Whistling Kite	3	(1)
Crested Pigeon	6	(3)	Swamp Harrier	2	(-)
Australasian Darter	-				

Wedge-tailed Eagle	-		Silver Gull	100	(-)
Brown Falcon	2		Rainbow Lorikeet	2	(-)
Australian Hobby	2	(-)	Red-rumped Parrot	15	(12)
Peregrine Falcon	-		Superb Fairy-wren	26	(6)
Nankeen Kestrel	1		White-plumed Honeyeater	13	(1)
Purple Swamphen	20	(18)	Noisy Miner	2	(2)
Baillon's Crake	-		Little Wattlebird	1	
Australian Spotted Crake	-		Red Wattlebird	2	
Black-tailed Native-hen	3	(3)	White-fronted Chat	100	
Dusky Moorhen	4	(3)	Australian Magpie	14	
Eurasian Coot	5000	(-)	Willie Wagtail	33	(3)
Black-winged Stilt	63		Little Raven	10	
Red-necked Avocet	120		Magpie-lark	220	(1)
Banded Stilt	1		Eurasian Skylark	4	
Red-capped Plover	40		Golden-headed Cisticola	15	(3)
Double-banded Plover	4		Australian Reed-Warbler	-	
Black-fronted Dotterel	28	(5)	Little Grassbird	1	(1)
Red-kneed Dotterel	NIL	(-)	Welcome Swallow	170	(4)
Masked Lapwing	150	(1)	Fairy Martin	2	
Latham's Snipe	8	(8)	Tree Martin	1	
Common Sandpiper	2		Common Blackbird	3	(-)
Common Greenshank	1		Common Starling	200	(40)
Red-necked Stint	13		Common Myna	70	(1)
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	50		Red-browed Finch	5	
Curlew Sandpiper	3		House Sparrow	30	
Caspian Tern (2 ads+1 juv)	3		Eurasian Tree Sparrow	2	
Whiskered Tern	-		Australasian Pipit	1	
White-winged Black Tern	-		European Goldfinch	20	(12)
Pacific Gull	1				

79 Bird species, (53 wetland dependant & raptors + 26 non-wetland).

Other fauna: Hare 2; Rabbit 6.

SUMMARY & COMMENTS on HABITAT:

January and the first three weeks of February has been a very dry period with low rainfall and high evaporation rates. The effects of this are very evident with many areas having completely dried so the plant is no longer the huge wetland that it has been since June 2010. Water level in the Doughnut has fallen by 20 cm! Consequently abundance of waterbirds has plummeted but whilst some 11 species have totally abandoned the Plant, *including all 71 Red-kneed Dotterels*, some new ones have arrived so diversity remains reasonably high. Among the highlights, shown in red in the table above, are a single **Banded Stilt**, the first here for decades, a large count of **Red-necked Avocet** (120), and **Double-banded Plovers** (4) have returned from breeding in New Zealand to winter here.

Southern Effluent Holding Basin (was SW Overflow Basin). Shallow water and much exposed mud is providing excellent waterbird habitat.

Western Effluent Holding Basin (WEHB). Totally dry.

Holding Basin 6. Just one small pool remains.

Basins 5, 4 & 3. Totally dry

Basin 2. Full with many waterfowl especially Coot.

Basin 1 and Annexe. Full and deep, hosting a moderate number of birds.

Golden Triangle. Some water remains in the lower ponds but all upper ones are dry so very few birds. It would be good if this area could be recharged.

Doughnut. The water level has fallen dramatically to well below 'full'. Depth gauge read 1.36 m, down 20 cm in five weeks! Thus diversity and abundance were well down with a total of 27 species comprising 17 wetland-dependant & raptors and 12 non-wetland dependant birds. This is now the only site on the plant hosting **Latham's Snipe** (7). Species numbers found here are shown in brackets () in the table and are included in the total for the plant.

Supernatant Basin. Holding shallow water.

(Aeration Tanks). Some ducks but even here the population has dropped.

(‘Northern Territory’ =NT). The dry sludge-drying pans are virtually bird-less.

Taylor’s Drain. Wet throughout and heavily vegetated. An ornamental pond has been excavated in the area overlooked by the new South Eastern Regional Office building and already has a pair of Australasian Grebes and a Black-fronted Dotterel. This to the south of the head-waters of the north-flowing Taylor’s Drain entry culvert under EastLink but has encroached slightly on the very valuable springtime habitat of Latham’s Snipe. Whether this will have no effect, be beneficial or detrimental to this valuable habitat, time will tell but disturbance along the strip immediately north of there to the next fence-line from Worsley Road across to and encompassing the adjacent woodlot should preferably be avoided.

Report prepared by Mike Carter, pterodroma@bigpond.com



Common Sandpiper assuming breeding plumage prior to migrating
ETP 26 February 2012

Photo by Alison Kuitert at



Brown Falcon, pale phase
Photo by Alison Kuitert at ETP 26 February 2012

March meeting - March 14, 2012: Ian Temby, "How Many is Too Many? – the Silver Gull Rookery of Frankston"

Ian Temby, recently retired from DSE, is a wildlife management expert, now consultant. He is the author of *Wild Neighbours - the Humane Approach to Living with Wildlife*. Ian studied the Silver Gulls of Frankston for his Masters thesis from 1999 – 2005.

Silver Gulls are a generalist and opportunist, and eat anything. Landfills are their major source of food. Ian had a graph of silver gull population compared with human population, from 1940s to recently. (No-one is doing a silver gull census now, but BOC used to). They were about 25% of human population in 1940s, and are now equivalent in numbers to humans. What has made the difference is food waste, which was small in the 1940s to 60s, and is now huge.

Gulls' daily routine is to feed, then bathe, then roost. They travel much further than would have been expected – from Mud Islands in the middle of the Bay, to landfills at Springvale or Broadmeadows for instance, and return, and a journey of 145 k in a day is routine.

Breeding: silver gulls used to only breed seasonally, on islands and dunes, on the ground. Now they are flexible, year round, and have taken to nesting on roofs. Overseas – 11 species of gulls have taken to roof nesting, which has led to increased breeding. The first occurrence of silver gulls nesting away from usual habitat was in 1982 at Point Henry, near Geelong, followed by Port Melbourne. Now as well as Melbourne they nest at Ballarat and Ararat, well inland. They prefer wide flat roofs, but as numbers build they will make do with steep roofs. In the Frankston survey roofs occupied by nests went from 28 to 113 from 2000 to 2003, and are now 142. In 2005 there were 315 nests, by 2005 770 nests.

Consequences of roof nesting are: corrosion of metal roofs (estimated to halve the life span), blocked gutters, causing flooding; fouling of air conditioner water supply; cleaning and repairs. As an example of the problems of roof nesting, one roof had 70 garbage bags of rubbish removed. The presence of large numbers of silver gulls also

creates problems of fouling for swimming pools, recreation areas, public water bodies, public spaces and cars. Costs to the economy per annum have been estimated at: \$500,000 for cleaning, \$2 mil for damage repair, \$1 mil for pest control. Control options include: manual egg & nest removal (this involves a permit as Silver Gulls are a protected native species), and which needs to be done regularly; frightening with noises or fake predators (not effective); and roof modification such as netting (which needs to be of the right type, so as not to become a lethal trap). These control options generally shift the problem from one roof to another, and gulls inhabit domestic roofs rather than industrial for instance. These measures treat the symptom, of nuisance, rather than the cause, which is over population.

An ecological approach is needed to reduce the amount of food available to gulls by public education re feeding and leaving waste food easily available; and modifications to landfill management, so that waste is covered more than once a day for instance. An example of good practice is the waste treatment plant at Eastern Creek in Sydney, where all waste is sorted mechanically, removing recyclables, composting organic matter, using the biogas for power and the end product needing approx 80% less land fill. There is also no opportunity for scavengers to access waste. Gulls are not the only problem for landfill – scavenging white ibis are a problem in NSW and Queensland.

If serious landfill management improvements took place, and gulls were deprived of easy food, there would be a management issue of hungry gulls looking for other food, such as crops, or starving to death. Culling could be necessary.

Questions from the floor: are peregrine falcons a control measure for gulls? Ian replied that peregrine falcons are few in number, and eat more feral pigeons and starlings than gulls. There were questions re culling methods: a narcotic poison is available. Another issue was how to motivate local government or the EPA to modify landfill management. Ian had an anecdote about Ford Motor Company's roof at Broadmeadows

becoming a roost for Silver Gulls. Ford asked DSE for help. There was a nearby landfill where the silver gulls were feeding, and Ian requested changes to this landfill's management. The EPA would not intervene, considering the management adequate. However, when the Ford Co. took their problem to Government, action became possible, and the problem was solved.

Melanie Attard, a local wildlife rescuer, has taken up the issue of Silver Gulls becoming entangled in netting on roofs, and is campaigning for pest control companies to use a better type of netting which does not entangle gulls. She has a blog - <http://ilovefrankstonseagulls.blog.com/>
- **Judy Smart**

Birdwatching at Balnarring and Coolart – March 2012

The weather was a little dull, with threat of showers, when we visited the two wetlands on the rumour of Freckled Duck being seen there.

First stop was Balbirooroo Wetlands in Balnarring. No Freckled Ducks, but a fairly impressive list of 40 birds. The highlights were a family of Brown-headed Honeyeaters, flying around our heads, with juveniles, and Blue-billed Ducks. Another uncommon sighting was a Greenfinch high in a tree.

Bird List: Balbirooroo Wetlands, Balnarring, March 5, 2012				
Blue-billed Duck (2 male, 1 female)	Great Egret	Silver Gull	White-eared Honeyeater	Grey Fantail
Australian Wood Duck	Australian White Ibis	Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	White-plumed Honeyeater	Willie Wagtail
Pacific Black Duck	Straw-necked Ibis	Rainbow Lorikeet	Brown-headed Honeyeater	Grey Butcherbird
Australasian Shoveler	Purple Swamphen	Superb Fairy-wren	New Holland Honeyeater	Australian Magpie
Chestnut Teal	Dusky Moorhen	Brown Thornbill	Golden Whistler (heard)	Welcome Swallow
Australasian Grebe	Eurasian Coot	Striated pardalote (heard)	Grey Shrike-thrush	Silvereye
Hoary-headed Grebe	Black-fronted Dotterel	White-browed Scrubwren	Magpie-Lark	Common Greenfinch
Little Black Cormorant	Masked Lapwing	Red Wattlebird	Noisy Miner	Common Blackbird

We then travelled on to Coolart, finding relatively few birds on the water, but here we did see Freckled Duck on the lagoon, as well as Blue-billed Duck. Of the 27 species sighted, 10 had not previously been sighted at Balnarring. An Echidna was also seen. **Judy Smart, Lee Denis**

Bird List: Coolart, March 5, 2012				
Blue-billed Duck	Little Pied Cormorant	Eurasian Coot	Noisy Miner	Welcome Swallow
Freckled Duck	Pied Cormorant	Spotted Turtle-Dove	Grey Shrike-thrush	Silvereye
Chestnut Teal	White-faced Heron	Common Bronzewing	Magpie-Lark	Common Myna
Hardhead	Great Egret	Crested Pigeon	Grey Fantail	
Australasian Grebe	Wedge-tailed Eagle	White-browed Scrubwren	Grey Butcherbird	
Hoary-headed Grebe	Purple Swamphen	Red Wattlebird	Australian Magpie	

Myrtle Rust

There is great concern at the moment around the spread of a fungal disease called Myrtle Rust which attacks plants of the Myrtaceae family, which includes eucalypts, melaleucas (paperbarks), callistemons (bottlebrushes), and leptospermums (ti-trees). These are obviously a major component of the Australian flora, and are a significant food source for fauna such as koalas.

The disease attacks young growing tips, and appears first as tiny grey to brown spots, which after about 14 days produce masses of yellow spores. The fungus spreads very easily, and has been recorded on the Peninsula.

Information sheets on detection, reporting and treatment of infected plants can be found at the DPI website www.dpi.vic.gov.au/myrtelrust.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Speakers

April Meeting: Our speakers will be Ian Wacey & Ray Barber, who have written a book detailing all of the waterfalls to be found in Victoria (April 11)

Our May meeting will feature a talk about freshwater algae presented by Karen Simonsen, Senior Biologist ALS: "Life in a Drop of Water" (May 9).

SEANA Campout

Our Club will host the SEANA autumn campout in March 2013, concentrating on the natural history of the Mornington Peninsula. We last hosted a campout in October 2007, which was a great success. More details will follow as planning progresses.

PFNC at 60

The Peninsula Field Naturalists Club turns 60 years old this year. We have yet to determine how we will mark the occasion – details as they come to hand.

Peninsula Field Naturalists Club Inc

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month with a field trip the following Saturday. Further information and current Programme of Events can be found at our website.

President:
Mrs Pat Gomm

All correspondence to
Secretary
Mrs Judy Smart

Annual Subs due July

Adult	\$20
Concession	\$15

Treasurer:
Ms Doris Weigert

www.home.vicnet.net.au/~penfnc

BHL



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